

# **Responsible Parenthood: Taking Care of Our Children**



## **Building the Case in Iowa**

**A Report to Governor Thomas J. Vilsack  
Interagency Work Group on Responsible Parenthood  
December, 2000**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Responsible Parenthood: Taking Care of Our Children**

### **Building the Case in Iowa**

The Interagency Work Group on Responsible Parenthood was established pursuant to Executive Order 15 to respond to the following key questions.

#### **Key Questions:**

What information is available to determine whether Iowa children receive emotional and financial support of both parents? What are the benefits, opportunities, barriers, and promising practices of maintaining and securing the involvement of both parents in the support of children?

- *The importance of the issue* became apparent.  
In Iowa, there are approximately 720,223 children under the age of 18. Approximately 54,140 children live in poverty with only one parent present in the household. In any given month, there are at least 38,505 cases in which the child support is not paid for that month. One indicator of emotional stress for children is the dissolution of marriage of their parents. Over half of the annual marriage dissolutions in Iowa involve minor children (5,477).
- Active support of both parents *benefits* the education, health, well being and the economic security of their children.
- The Interagency Work Group conducted an *assessment of state programs* in Iowa, which serve parents and children. As part of the assessment, the Workgroup identified barriers that may impede both parents' active involvement with their children. The barriers may be policy and/or procedures. The service *system appears fragmented* in consistently providing support to both parents regarding their parental responsibilities. At times, the absent parent is ignored. In some cases, no effort is made to include the absent parent.
- The Work Group submits sixteen recommendations. Most of the recommendations are directed to state government. The remainder is directed to a proposed citizen task force.

**Recommendations for state government include:**

1. Remove Barriers in Policy and Practice
2. Increase Awareness of the Public and Professionals
3. Implement Cross Training of Disciplines
4. Create a Network to Support Families in Partnership with Communities
5. Improve Communication Across Delivery System
6. Offer Parents Opportunities to Increase Knowledge and Skills
7. Ensure Availability of Resource Guides by Local Areas
8. Develop Guidance for Staff when Working with Families where Both Parents Cannot be Safely Involved in the Child's Life.
9. Encourage the Reporting of the Impact of Services to Families
10. Continue Opportunities for State Agencies to Discuss Parenthood Issues
11. Develop Partnerships Across State Agencies to Implement Policy and Programs
12. Communicate Lessons Learned from Projects Underway in Iowa
13. Create a Task Force to Champion Responsible Parenthood.

**Recommendations for the proposed task force include:**

14. Articulate a Vision of What It Means to Support Families
15. Broaden the Scope of the People Who Are Engaged in this Effort
16. Organize a Public Awareness Campaign

These recommendations for action reflect a beginning point for a coordinated and focused effort of the public through a proposed task force and state government to address the need to support both parents in their most important work: raising their children.

Friday, December 29, 2000

## Responsible Parenthood: Taking Care of Our Children Building the Case in Iowa

### Executive Summary

	Page
I. Background	
A. Interagency Work Group on Responsible Parenthood.....	1
B. Key Assumptions.....	1-2
II. Scope of the Issue	
A. Number of Iowa Children Impacted.....	2-3
B. Consequences of Not Paying Attention to the Risk Factors.....	3
III. Benefits of Both Parents' Involvement with Children	
A. Education.....	4
B. Health and Well Being.....	4
C. Economic Security.....	4
IV. Current Community Services and Projects	
A. Parental Obligation Pilots.....	5
B. Workforce Development Grants.....	6-7
V. Suggested Practices: What Has Been Learned From Other States .....	7-8
VI. Identification of Barriers in State Policy/Procedures .....	8-9
VII. Recommendations	
A. State Government Action.....	9-10
B. Proposed Task Force Action.....	10-11

Appendix A What Is Happening in Selected States: A Summary

Appendix B What Are Some of the Leading States Doing?

Appendix C Who Are Some of the Leading National Fatherhood Organizations and What Are They Doing?

Attachment - Executive Order Fifteen

## **Responsible Parenthood: Taking Care of Our Children Building the Case in Iowa**

### **I. Background**

In Executive Order Number 15, Governor Thomas J. Vilsack addresses the issue of responsible parenthood. The Executive Order acknowledges that children need to receive the support and guidance of both parents. Children who have two parents actively and positively engaged in their lives have a greater chance for success than do children who have only one parent actively involved in their lives. In most single parent families, the absent parent is the father. To begin the efforts of ensuring that both parents are involved in the lives of their children, Governor Vilsack established a state Interagency Work Group.

An Interagency Work Group was directed to identify barriers within state policy and procedures that may act to impede the development of strong emotional and financial bonds of support between both parents and their children. (See attachment for complete text for Executive Order Fifteen.) This report outlines the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the Work Group.

#### *A. Interagency Work Group on Responsible Parenthood*

Executive Order Number 15, signed on March 14, 2000, created the Interagency Work Group on Responsible Parenthood. The Work Group is comprised of representatives from the Departments of Human Services, Public Health, Corrections, Education, Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning, Iowa Workforce Development and the Empowerment Board. The Executive Order outlines several tasks to be completed by the work group. The tasks include:

- ◆ identifying barriers within policies/procedures and practices that deter the involvement of both parents,
- ◆ identifying promising practices that support and engage both parents in the emotional and financial support of their children,
- ◆ identifying opportunities that may exist among programs administered by departments to assist the absent parent in providing emotional and financial support,
- ◆ attempting to quantify benefits of increasing the level of involvement of both parents, and
- ◆ proposing recommendations to remove barriers.

#### *B. Key Assumptions*

The Work Group adopted several underlying assumptions in addressing the issues of responsible parenthood. The assumptions include:

- parents need to be actively and positively involved with their children's lives regardless of the parents' living situation or marital status,

- in situations in which fathers threaten the health and well being of women and children, care must be taken to assure the safety of family members,
- parents, in addition to their parenting responsibilities, may be addressing such issues as poverty, lack of education, substance and drug abuse, poor job skills, and lack of employment.

## **II. Scope of the Issue**

Various data sources give some indication of the estimated number of children in Iowa and circumstances that may impact the children (poverty, dissolution of marriages, children born out of wedlock and child support statistics). The magnitude of the issue is reflected in the numbers. In addition, national research on the consequences of these risk factors is noted.

### *A. Number of Iowa Children Impacted*

#### **1. Children in Iowa Under the Age of 18**

There are 720,223 children in Iowa under the age of 18 according to the U.S. Census Bureau 1999 estimates. The percentage (25.1%) is comparable to the U.S. percentage (25.7%) of children under the age of 18.

#### **2. Number of Children in Iowa Under the Age of 18 in Poverty**

There are 100,262 children in Iowa under the age of 18 living in poverty according U.S. Census Bureau County Estimates for 1997. Approximately 54% of these children live with only one parent present in the household.

#### **3. Dissolutions of Marriages in Iowa**

There were 9,737 dissolutions in Iowa in 1999. The number of dissolutions has been under 10,000 for the last three consecutive years. (Goudy, Burke and Hanson, Iowa Counties:Selected Population Trends, Vital Statistics, and Socioeconomic Data, 2000 Edition)

In 1998, 55.2% of dissolutions involved minor children (under 18 years of age). The number of children impacted in the 1998 dissolutions was 9,923. (Vital Statistics of Iowa, 1998, prepared by the Center for Health Statistics, Iowa Department of Public Health)

#### **4. Children in Iowa Born Out of Wedlock**

In 1998, there were 37,262 live births in Iowa. Of the live births, 10,149 (27.2%) were born out of wedlock. Of the out of wedlock births, 32.1% of them were born to teen mothers, 19 years old and younger. For African American women, 72.3% of live births were out of wedlock. (Vital Statistics of Iowa, 1998, prepared by the Center for Health Statistics, Iowa Department of Public Health)

5. Births to Teenagers

The number of births to women less than 19 years of age in 1998, was 3,940 (10.6% of all live births). The number of African American teen births in 1998 was 276 (25.5% of all African American live births). (Vital Statistics of Iowa, 1998, prepared by the Center for Health Statistics, Iowa Department of Public Health)

6. Number of Children whose Paternity Cannot be Established

Based on 1998 Iowa Birth Certification file, there were 12.5% live born babies who did not have their father's information available at birth. (Vital Statistics of Iowa, 1998, prepared by the Center for Health Statistics, Iowa Department of Public Health)

7. Children Not Receiving Child Support

In any given month, children in approximately 38,505 cases with current support due receive no payments toward current support. (Bureau of Collections, Iowa Department of Human Services, 2000)

*B. Consequences of Not Paying Attention to the Risk Factors*

The current body of research indicates that risky behaviors and negative consequences increase when children do not have the support of both parents.

- Fatherless children are at a dramatically greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse. Seventy five per cent of all adolescents in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes.--Source: US Dept. of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Survey on Child Health. Washington, DC, 1993.
- Fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of school. 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes. --Sources: US Dept. of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Survey on Child Health. Washington, DC, 1993. Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization, quoting from a recent study by Men Against Domestic Violence.
- Three out of four teenage suicides occur in households where a parent has been absent. Ninety per cent of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes.-- Sources: Elshtain, Jean Bethke, "Family Matters: The Plight of America's Children." The Christian Century, July 1993. Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization, quoting from a recent study by Men Against Domestic Violence.
- "... children raised apart from one of their parents are less successful in adulthood..., and...many of their problems result from a loss of income, parental involvement and supervision, and ties to the community.-- Source: McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994 Growing Up with a Single Parents, p 134.
- Children in single-parent families are more likely to get pregnant as teenagers than their peers who grow up with two parents. --Source: US Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics. "National Health Interview Survey." Hyattsville, MD, 1988.

### **III. Benefits of Both Parents' Involvement with Children**

Much of the research on responsible parenthood focuses on defining the consequences of risk factors rather than quantifying the benefits of increased active support of both parents. The following is a sample of the research on the benefits of active support of both parents.

#### *A. Education*

When both parents are involved in the child's education e.g., attending school meetings, parent-teacher conferences, volunteering at school, class events, there is a higher likelihood that the child will receive high grades and enjoy school and reduce the likelihood that a grade will be repeated. --Source: Nord, C.W., Brimhall, D. & West, J. *Fathers Involvement in Schools*, 1997, U.S. Department of Education in "What Do Fathers Contribute to Children's Well Being" Child Trends Research Brief.

#### *B. Health and Well Being*

The involvement and support of the father is the best predictor that the mother will receive adequate prenatal care. Prenatal care ensures a healthy start for children. --Source: *Fathers A Huge Influence For Young Children*, Center for Public Policy Priorities.

According to a Gallup Poll, 90.3 percent of Americans agree that "fathers make a unique contribution to their children's lives" -- Source: Gallup Poll, 1996. National Center for Fathering "Father Figures". *Today's Father* 4.1 (1996).

A study on parent-infant attachment found that fathers who were affectionate, spent time with their children, and overall had a positive attitude were more likely to have securely attached infants. --Source: Cox, M.J. et al. "Prediction of Infant-Father and Infant-Mother Attachment". *Developmental Psychology* 28 (1992): 474-483.

Father-child interaction has been shown to promote a child's physical well-being, perceptual abilities, and competency for relatedness with others, even at a young age.-- Source: Krampe, E. M. and P.D. Fairweather. "Father Presence and Family Formation: A theoretical Reformation." *Journal of Family Issues* 14.4 (December 1993): 572-591.

#### *C. Economic Security*

Economic security is important to promote the well being of the child. Both parents supporting the child financially reduce risk factors associated with poverty. Poverty levels are reduced when both parents are present: single parent families have a poverty rate of 46% while two parent families have a rate of approximately 10%. --Source: *Map and Track: State Initiatives to Encourage Responsible Fatherhood*, 1999 Edition, National Center for Children in Poverty.

### **IV. Current Community Services and Projects**

The Interagency Work Group conducted a preliminary survey to assess the services being offered through state agencies to support both parents in their parenting responsibilities and/or specific services created to include the fathers.



The findings of the survey reveal great inconsistency. For example, some of the community correctional facilities provide parenting training for inmates, but many do not. There were few services identified to assist young fathers.

In the human service delivery system, some services that assist families do not systematically include both parents in the service plan. The legal authority to include both parents is not provided, consequently, the non-custodial parent is not eligible for the services.

Two state agencies have received funding to assist non-custodial parents with their parental financial obligations and employment skills. The Department of Human Services is administering Parental Obligation Projects and Iowa Workforce Development is administering federal Welfare to Work grants.

#### *A. Parental Obligation Pilots*

Since 1998, the General Assembly has allocated TANF block grant money which is combined with federal Access and Visitation Grant to establish pilot projects to address barriers for low income non custodial parents as they seek to provide emotional and financial support to their children. The funding is to be used to implement local strategies to keep both parents involved with their children. In addition, child support provides incentives for participants.

Four projects were funded in 1999:

- Cass/Mills/Montgomery County Decategorization: This project, in a very rural area, includes post-divorce/post-relationship classes to discuss a variety of parenting issues with both parents; fatherhood seminars – group meetings to discuss a wide variety of topics; Saturday with My Dad – parent/child activities; and public awareness activities.
- Muscatine County Decategorization: This project, in a mid-sized county with a mix of rural and light industry, includes a neutral exchange site where children can be safely exchanged for a visit with the noncustodial parent; comprehensive case planning and referral for all participants; a wide variety of supervised father/child activities including fatherhood groups and parent skills training; and public awareness activities.
- Pottawattamie County Decategorization: This project, in a more metropolitan area includes providing in-home assessments for fathers; individual support for fathers; support groups; father/child activities; mediation for parents; and public awareness activities.
- Polk County Decategorization: This project in Des Moines, includes providing neutral exchange sites, supervised visitation, and mediation services on a sliding fee scale, partially underwritten by grant funds.

In 2000, the General Assembly appropriated \$250,000 of TANF block grant money which is combined with federal Access and Visitation funds. Three additional pilot projects are being funded:

- Howard/Allamakee/Winneshiek/Clayton County (HAWC): This project will provide assessment and referral services as part of developing a “family plan”, transportation and support to children who are involved with the Children in the Middle program, stipends to parents for completing the classes, a neutral exchange program, and family mentoring.
- Siouxland Human Investment Program (SHIP): This project will provide job-related training/mentoring services, mediation services, neutral exchange, mentoring and assessment services.
- Polk County Decategorization: This project will expand to offer a number of additional services as part of a much larger “Fostering Male Involvement” project. This project is funded from a variety of sources, only one of which is this grant. The activities funded under this grant include supervised visitation, family mediation, neutral exchange sites, fatherhood support groups, parent/child activities, and a public awareness campaign.

#### *B. Workforce Development Grants*

In 2000, a portion of the Welfare to Work dollars has been used to fund local initiatives. The purpose of the grants is to encourage more local partners to use innovative service approaches in the Welfare to Work program. Three projects are being funded:

- Urban Dreams, Creative Visions and Central Iowa Employment and Training Consortium: The demonstration program will serve 30 participants and will target non-custodial parents, including ex-offenders and individuals with multiple barriers and substance abuse. The project places a major emphasis on developing “soft skills” necessary to retaining employment and support services.
- Eastern Iowa Community College District, Iowa East Central TRAIN: In this project, judges in Region 9 counties will have the option to court order non-custodial parents to the program. The judges will receive an evaluation of the parents’ work history, educational level, math and reading scores, and lists of potential jobs with wage rates to assist the judges in determining the appropriate child support orders. Up to 36 eligible persons will be enrolled in Welfare to Work.
- Boys and Girls Home and Family Services, Western Iowa Tech Community College: The program will assist 146 eligible persons to obtain unsubsidized employment.

The program will provide transitional services, enhanced job search, group therapy workshops, substance abuse evaluations, in-home services, including peer support and role modeling, transportation and child care.

The pilots are relatively new or are in the beginning implementation phase. Consequently, long term results have not been accomplished. However, data are being collected. It is anticipated that in the future, these pilots will inform current policy and practice.

## **V. Suggested Practices: What Has Been Learned From Other States**

In many states, the approach has been to create separate programs that focus on the absent parent, in most cases it is the father. Many of the new programs have not yet generated concrete results. The lack of results may also be due to the lack of evaluation measures of the programs. Cost effectiveness and cost benefit evaluations have not been conducted. Rather accountability is measured by process, number of participants, amount of service, and cost of programs. The following is a list of best practices and common denominators from other state “fatherhood initiatives”.

### *Common Denominators of Successful Fatherhood Program*

- Grassroots support through information:
  - Engage the public and media on the importance of fathers without diminishing the importance of mothers.
  - Show the benefits to children. It is an urgent message.
  - Target the message to the public/mother/father.
- Involve those who have a stake:
  - Fathers:
    - Mentoring/talking/supporting in a father to father approach
    - Fathers participating in planning for themselves in the programs are more likely to take responsibility for the result.
  - Community:
    - Benefit from the strong families and pay when there is a disconnection.
    - Potential resources are many. Flexibility needs to be provided to allow the new combinations and partners.
  - Faith Community:
    - Offers opportunity for financial and in-kind resources
    - Supports the value/ importance parents
- Innovation
  - Build on what already exists but think outside the box in combining services and resources, and partners that help fathers support their children.
  - Be flexible in the process and focus on results.
- Incentives
  - Develop methods that encourage fathers to overcome barriers
  - Child support incentives like partial satisfaction of debt owed to the state or lowered income-withholding amounts.

- Opportunities for new job skills or work through workforce development
- Offer tickets for father child activities

Sources: Map and Track, State Initiatives to Encourage Responsible Fatherhood, 1999 Edition. National Coalition for Children in Poverty. National Fatherhood Initiative. The Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization. The National Center for Fathering. Effective Strategies for Working with Young Fathers, MELD, 1997. Restoring Fathers to Families and Communities. A State Policy-makers Guide to Fatherhood, Social Policy Action Network, 2000. Involving Males in Preventing Teen Pregnancy, A Guide for Program Planners, The Urban Institute, 1997. Broke but not Deadbeat, Reconnecting Low-income Fathers and Children, National Conference of State Legislatures, 1999.

## **VI. Identification of Barriers in State Policy/Procedures**

Many barriers exist within state policies and procedures that effect the emotional and financial bonds between children and their parents. Barriers are both unintentional and intended. The Work Group identified barriers to responsible parenthood that exist across the state agencies included in this project. Each agency has a detailed list of its identified barriers. The lists can be requested from the representatives on the Work Group.

### *Barriers in State Policy/Procedures*

- A. Office Hours – Services are offered only during the business day that limits employed parents access to services.
- B. Targeted Populations – Services are targeted for a specific population in an effort to contain costs. Eligibility requirements limit the population to be served. Consequently, there are parents who do not receive needed services.
- C. No Incentive for Both Parents Being Involved – When children are being served, there are no requirements that both parents are involved. Often only one parent is asked to participate which, in most cases, is the mother.
- D. Requires More Effort – More effort which includes resources, time and training of staff is necessary to include both parents.
- E. Staff Uncomfortable in Delivering Services to ‘Fractured Families’ – Providing services to families, where issues have not been resolved, may escalate the family difficulties.
- F. Lack of Expectation that Fathers be Involved – Services have been designed to serve mothers and children. Often, fathers have not been considered in the delivery of the service.

- G. Fragmented Delivery System – There is no systematic approach for wrapping services around the entire family.
- H. Lack of Affordable and Available Services – Services that are often needed are not available or are offered at a cost that is prohibitive.
- I. Focus has been on when Families are in Trouble – Little attention has been paid to families before their situation escalates to a crisis.
- H. Timeliness of Prevention – Educational information that might prevent problems is not offered at opportune times.
- J. Control of Policy/Practice is Diffuse - Policies may be independently created and implemented by federal, state, and local delivery systems without any consistency or coordination.

## **VII. Recommendations**

The Work Group has sixteen recommendations and proposes a locus of responsibility for carrying out the recommendations. Most of the recommendations are directed to state government. Others are directed to a proposed citizen task force.

### *A. State Government Action*

State government can play an important role in supporting parents and their children. The following recommendations encompass a variety of strategies and actions:

1. Remove Barriers in Policy and Procedures - Recognizing that budgets have already been submitted to the Governor and that to change policy may require a change in the allocation of resources, it is recommended that further exploration be conducted by the state agencies in addressing these barriers.
2. Increase Awareness of the Public and Professionals - Raising awareness that including both parents in the lives of their children is critical. Changing our thinking about the roles of mothers and fathers requires a cultural shift.
  - a) Engage local print and electronic media in emphasizing the importance of fathers without diminishing the importance of mothers.
3. Implement Cross Training of Disciplines - Workers within each discipline should be aware of common knowledge areas regarding families that might not typically be within their discipline e.g., how to deal with violent behavior in a family.
4. Create A Network to Support Families in Partnership with Communities - The delivery system could be designed to ‘*familize*’ rather than to ‘*individualize*’, in other words, the family as a whole is considered.

Many of the current programs in Iowa and other states segment the family. Too often, the opportunity is missed to systematically deal with both parents. Attempts are not consistently made to engage both parents; rather the parent who is physically present is relied upon to represent both parents. Problem solving utilizing both parents' perspectives has the potential to increase the likelihood that both parents will support the actions of their joint problem solving efforts. The family should be viewed as a whole regardless of marital status or custodial arrangements.

5. Improve Communication Across Delivery Systems - Continue to enhance communication throughout the system at the provider and policy levels.

6. Offer both parents opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills in raising children.

7. Ensure Availability of Resource Guides by Local Areas – Ensure that both providers and families have access to the listing of available resources to provide for the well being of the family in their area. The Work Group was not able to identify a comprehensive list of local resources of parenting services. An additional effort to compile current and updated lists of local resources is recommended.

8. Develop guidance to staff who work directly with families regarding the limited situations where both parents cannot be safely involved in the child's life.

9. Encourage the reporting of the impact of services on the family's well being - Support data collection and analysis (what does the Iowa data reveal, what are the implications for policy and practice). Particular attention should be paid to minority families and teen parents.

10. Continue expectations and providing opportunities for state agencies to discuss the issue of responsible parenthood.

11. Develop partnerships within and across state agencies to implement policy and programs that focus on the well being of the family.

12. Ensure that state agencies are aware of the lessons learned from the existing and new projects that are targeted at increasing parental involvement.

13. Create a task force to champion this effort- Creating a task force could enhance the visibility of the cause as well as serving as the body who keeps the attention focus on the issues. The group could also serve as a catalyst.

#### *B. Proposed Task Force Action*

Preliminary actions by the proposed task force may include the following:

14. Articulate a vision of what it means to support families- A task force could propose a vision to the Governor of what all Iowans need to do to value and support parents in raising their children. A common vision will ensure that all parts of the system are operating from the same perspective; a shared understanding of the common goals. State government can be held accountable to support the vision.

15. Broaden the scope of people who are engaged in this effort - Recruit more representatives beyond the state agencies who represent diverse populations, ages, consumers, business and community.

16. Organize a public awareness campaign in conjunction with state agencies that would heighten the awareness of the importance of both parents' involvement in the lives of their children.

These recommendations for action reflect a beginning point for a coordinated and focused effort of the public through a task force and state agencies to address the need to support both parents in their most important work: raising their children. Although state agencies can contribute with significant actions that will impact parents and their children, a task force can engage a larger public and offer a more diverse perspective. The joint effort can support the well being of Iowa families ensuring that all children have both parents involved in their lives.

Submitted by: Jessie Rasmussen, Director, Department of Human Services  
Kip Kautzy, Director, Department of Corrections  
Richard Running, Director, Iowa Workforce Development  
Ted Stilwill, Director, Department of Education  
Jo Oldson, Office of the Governor  
Ed Schor, MD, Medical Director, Department of Public Health  
Kris Bell, Empowerment, Department of Management  
Dick Moore, Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning

With the assistance of staff:

Tony Dietsch, Iowa Workforce Development  
Martha Gelhaus, Department of Public Health  
Sally Kraemer, Department of Corrections  
Mike McClain, University of Iowa Child Health Specialty Clinics &  
Iowa State University Dept. of Human Development & Family  
Jeanne Nesbit, Department of Human Services  
Jim Pender, Department of Human Services  
Fred Scaletta, Department of Corrections  
Linda Swenson, Department of Human Services  
Shanell Wagler, Department of Management

For additional information, contact Linda Swenson 515/242-3236.

## **Appendix A**

# **WHAT'S HAPPENING IN SELECTED STATES?**

## **A SUMMARY**



## **What's Happening in Fatherhood?**

July, 2000

Based on interviews with selected states

Eleven states were selected to be interviewed based upon their being recognized and cited as leaders in fatherhood programs, or because their programs have been acknowledged by national organizations as being particularly effective in services to involve fathers. Many of these states have been the sites of national pilots and demonstration projects. The states interviewed include: California (many demonstration projects), Colorado (a fatherhood commission), Connecticut (examination of policy, multiple programs), Florida (the generally recognized leader), Illinois (many programs, excellent statewide public awareness campaign), Indiana (many demonstration grants), Minnesota (recognized leader), Maryland (site of many pilots), Missouri (many pilots, very effective integrated programming), North Carolina (recognized national leader), Virginia (fatherhood commission, many programs). All were asked to address the following areas. Their answers have been abstracted below.

### **Cost/benefit ratio**

- Most states have no data. A few are just beginning to gather data, but expect it to be at least a year before they have anything. All believe that the immediate dollar benefits are much less important than future benefits which are less tangible.
- Los Angeles County has been able to have participant and control groups in their Parents Fair Share demonstration project. They found a 12% difference in child support payments between participants and members of the control group. In addition many fewer enforcement activities were necessary.
- Florida found that they took in \$4 for every \$1 spent in fatherhood activities.

### **Policy/practice barriers to fatherhood**

- Most states have done no formal assessment of government policies and practices.
- Colorado will convene a policy study group per new legislation.
- Connecticut convened a committee to examine policy as it pertained to each of the service initiatives in their legislation. It has taken them a full year thus far. They have just collated their research and recommendations. They focused on several specific strategic areas, which include:
  - ◆ Support Fatherhood Initiative goals.
  - ◆ Assist and prepare men for the emotional, legal, financial, and educational responsibilities of fatherhood.
  - ◆ Promote the establishment of paternity at childbirth.
  - ◆ Promote public education concerning the emotional, social, financial, and educational responsibilities of fatherhood.
  - ◆ Integrate state and local services for families.
  - ◆ Create a statewide inventory of services available to support fathers.
  - ◆ Develop and implement demonstration/research sites.
- Florida convened a committee per their legislation to review all state policies and to ensure that all new legislation considers responsible fatherhood. They also used regional groups. They specifically targeted family law as problematic.
- Virginia has worked mostly with practitioners who work with fathers directly.

### Educational programs

- Most states (nearly all) have a wide range of programs, often locally based, which offer at least Adult Basic Education, job skills training, and parenting skills training. Much of this is offered through guided support groups. Often the leaders are former participants.

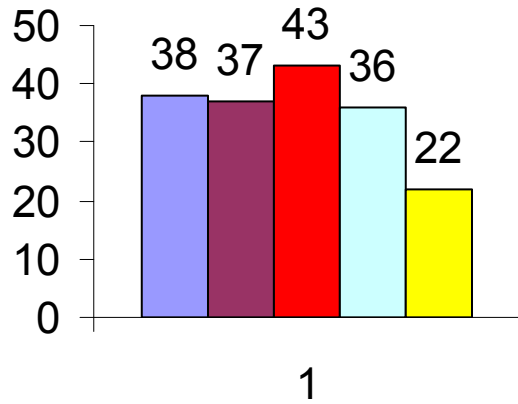
### Best practices

- The most consistently cited is to have support groups using former participants as group leaders. Florida's support groups become strong and self-sustaining, drawing in members and maintaining support. They emphasize the need for the groups to be same-culture throughout.
- Colorado strongly recommends "Bootcamp for Young Dads", a program based in Irvine, CA. It works with young men before birth to give them basic understanding of needed skills. Colorado follows up with long-term support groups and newsletters.
- Several states have initiated projects to help dads secure enforcement of visitation orders and to help them with access to courts to secure more favorable orders.
- It is crucial to have a wide range of public awareness activities: multi-media, e.g., print, radio, billboards, TV, brochures and eye-catching pamphlets. Florida believes it's crucial to involve dads in designing content and graphics, as dads know best what they need to know and what's most likely to get attention.
- Use public schools to teach parenting skills and life development skills as well as too-early parenting prevention.
- Ask programs to be creative and not to always focus on child support collections since parents offer much more than simply money to support their children.
- The top states (Virginia and Florida), in fact most states, worked extensively with the national organizations to help them be on the cutting edge: National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF), National Center for Fathering (NCF). Iowa has a program in which NFI is working in the correctional institution at Rockwell City with incarcerated dads.

**Appendix B**

**WHAT ARE SOME  
OF  
THE LEADING STATES  
DOING?**

## What are States Doing?



- Promoting public awareness
- Working to prevent pregnancy
- Enhancing fathers as economic providers
- Promoting fathers as nurturers
- Building leadership capacity

State	Primary Contact Person	Other Contact People	Cost/Benefit Data	Policy/Practice Barriers in Government
California	Ed Flores, 916-654-1214	Linda Jenkins, 323-832-7216, Chuck Adams, 323-260-3861	Some from Parents' Fair Share and also some cost/benefit data. Long term collections data. 12% difference between control group and participant group.	Men identify arrearages and size of them as barriers. Court facilitator has helped them file their own downward modification. CA charges 10% interest on arrearages.
Colorado	Jim Garcia, 303-837-8466 x1106	Chuck Ault, St. Joseph's Hospital, 303-866-8280; Debbie Sykes, Program Coordinator, 949-786-3146, Irvine, CA	No. At a recent conference, funders were clear that results will take years to evaluate.	In last legislative session, a resolution was introduced giving the fatherhood council authority to convene a policy study group to make recommendations regarding state policy. This group has not yet been convened.
Connecticut	Tom Horan, Public Assistance Consultant within IV-D, 860-424-5270	Dawn Homer-Bouthiette, Acting Director of Strategic Planning, 860-424-4905	No.	CT created an interagency committee, representing all government agencies to perform a detailed examination of state practice/policy to make it more father-friendly. This is a part of implementing the fatherhood initiative legislation. They used multiple workgroups.

State	Primary Contact Person	Other Contact People	Cost/Benefit Data	Policy/Practice Barriers in Government
Florida	Jerry Smith, 850-488-4952		Other than programs which specifically focus on repaying child support, their programs have focussed on parenting involvement and skills. A cost/benefit ratio of 1:4.	All as a part of the fatherhood initiative legislation: established a coalition to perform all legislatively mandated duties, identified gaps in services to fathers that result in obstacles or barriers to responsible fatherhood, monitored legislative developments to ensure that responsible fatherhood was included in public policy planning and implementation, made legislative recommendations to remove obstacles/barriers, developed regional subcommittees. Particularly identified the area of family law as fraught with barriers.
Illinois	Cory Burris, 217-782-6973, Joseph Mason, Illinois Child Support, 312-793-0193	Geneva Evans Bishop, dhhs, 312-353-8416	Increase collections 15% - 20% in target group	Nothing yet. No formal plans to do any review of policy.

State	Primary Contact Person	Other Contact People	Cost/Benefit Data	Policy/Practice Barriers in Government
Maryland	Johnny Rice, Deputy Director, Office of Community Initiatives, 410-767-6681	Anthony Williams, 361-2185	Not completed yet; most successful outcomes aren't monetary	Different community based forums have stated that they are aware of many barriers, but no formal review.
Missouri	Clayvon Wesley, (314) 877-2069		No.	Nothing yet. No formal plans to do any review of policy.
Virginia	Ron Clark, Virginia Fatherhood Campaign, 804-692-0400		No.	Much work with practitioners who deal directly with fathers. Young men need an advocate to deal with child support. Courts attitude of siding with mothers. Working with local offices for culture shift. Nothing yet with formal state policy. All work so far has been with agencies.

**Appendix C**

**WHO ARE SOME OF THE  
LEADING NATIONAL FATHERHOOD  
ORGANIZATIONS  
AND  
WHAT ARE THEY DOING?**



## Comparison of Major National Fatherhood Programs

<b>National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI);</b> Gaithersburg, MD (1994)	To improve the well-being of children by increasing the number of children who grow up with loving, committed and respected fathers.	Public education highlighting the importance of fathers; coalition building across the nation; personal training for men to become better fathers.	Fatherhood resources; programs for incarcerated fathers (including Rockwell City, IA); annual conference; TA on program development evaluation; media kits on importance of fatherhood.	Wade Horn, Ph. D., Pres.; closely allied with conservative religious organizations.
<b>Institute for Responsible Fatherhood &amp; Family Revitalization;</b> Washington, D.C. (1984)	Turn the hearts of fathers toward their children.	Uses a curriculum designed to change the hearts and attitudes of men first, then deal with job training, illiteracy, and overcoming other barriers. Focus on involving men in emotionally supporting their families first.	Operates programs in 7 major metropolitan cities (Cleveland, Milwaukee, San Diego, Nashville, Washington, D.C., Yonkers, NY); use novel approach of husband/wife couple living in neighborhood as "model parents".	Charles Ballard, President and CEO; conservative viewpoint; sites using their model become program "affiliates".
<b>The Fatherhood Project,</b> New York, NY. (1981)	A national research and education project that is examining the future of fatherhood and developing ways to support men's involvement in child rearing.	Media presentations; ongoing research into best practices for a father-friendly workplace; publications and seminars for the public, workers, and managers.	State Initiatives on Responsible Fatherhood: an examination of policies and programs in all 50 states that will yield an understanding of government's role in fostering fatherhood; The Male Involvement Project: a national training initiative helping Head Start and early childhood programs get fathers involved in the lives of their children.	James Levine, Ph.D., Dir.; longest running national initiative on fatherhood. Major focus on dads who must balance work and home life.

<b>National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF);</b> Philadelphia, PA (1994)	To improve the life chances of children and the efficacy of families and to support and conduct the dissemination of research that advances the understanding of father involvement.	Interdisciplinary policy research which is practice-focused and practice-based. All research is developed around seven <i>Core Learnings</i> distilled from the experiences of practitioners and programs that serve fathers. Intent is to expand the knowledge base on father involvement and to contribute to critical discussion in policy.	***"FatherLit" research data base; Publish literature reviews on a variety of fatherhood topics; *Convene discussion forums of researchers, policy makers and practitioners to craft and implement agendas to respond to the needs of father and families; Provide presentations at meetings and conferences.	They base everything on empirical research. Affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania
<b>National Center for Fathering (NCF);</b> Kansas City, MO (1990)	To inspire and equip men to be better fathers.	Practical and applied research on fathers and fathering to develop resources and recommendations for dads in nearly every fathering situation.	Nationwide radio program; seminars for dads; weekly free newsletter which contains practical suggestions for dads' involvement; technical assistance to government, social agencies, private sector on fatherhood issues; research on fatherhood issues; presentations for conferences	Private non-profit, Ken Canfield, Exec. Dir.; provide direct TA geared to raising public awareness of the impact of "fatherlessness" and "fatherfulness".
<b>National Center for Strategic Non-Profit Planning and Community Leadership (NPCL);</b> Washington, D.C. (1996)	To improve the governance and administration of non-profit tax-exempt organizations and strengthen community leadership through family and neighborhood empowerment; to help community-based organizations and public agencies better serve young, low-income single fathers and fragile families.	Providing TA to public agencies to develop programs for fragile families; assist in developing partnerships; planning and facilitation of conferences; professional development for building partnerships and related activities; Partners for Fragile Families initiative to help low income fathers share the legal, financial and emotional responsibilities of parenthood.	Peer Learning College (gathering of child support colleagues to encourage sharing of innovative approaches to involving fathers); share information about state-of-the-art child support enforcement; identify cultural and policy barriers to fathers' involvement; identify strategies for intervention and cross-agency collaboration; leadership development, annual conference	Jeffery Johnson, Ph.D., President and CEO, frequent national-level presenter; close working relationship with IV-D agencies (NCSEA).

**Attachment**  
**EXECUTIVE ORDER NUMBER FIFTEEN**

**WHEREAS**, Iowans have traditionally recognized that strong families are essential to ensuring that our children will enjoy a secure future; and

**WHEREAS**, Iowans intuitively understand that children need to receive the support and guidance of both parents; and

**WHEREAS**, an emerging set of scientific data supports our belief that a healthy bond between a child and the child's parents has a direct impact on the future success of the child; and

**WHEREAS**, the absence of one parent from a child's life can place that child at greater risk of health, emotional, educational, and behavior problems associated with the child's development; and

**WHEREAS**, for most children, the absent parent is the father; and

**WHEREAS**, studies reveal that children with an absent parent are more likely to develop substance abuse problems, drop out of school, become teenage parents, and engage in criminal behavior than children who maintain healthy bonds with both parents; and

**WHEREAS**, children with two parents who actively and positively engage in their life by providing financial support, love, guidance, and discipline, have a greater chance for success than children who receive active involvement from only one parent.

**NOW, THEREFORE**, I, Thomas J. Vilsack, Governor of the State of Iowa, by the power vested in me by the laws of the constitution of the State of Iowa do hereby order the creation of the INTER-AGENCY WORK GROUP ON RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD.

I. Purpose. The Inter-Agency Work Group on Responsible Parenthood is established to complete the following tasks:

1. Identify barriers within state policy and procedures that may act to impede the development of strong emotional and financial bonds of support between both parents and their children;
2. Identify opportunities that may exist among programs administered by departments to assist the absent parent in providing emotional and financial support for their children;
3. Propose adjustments to state policy and procedures to reduce barriers that discourage parents from developing a strong foundation of support for their children;

4. Identify promising practices that support and engage both parents in the emotional and financial support of their children;
  - a. Identify services that have been successful in keeping young fathers actively involved in strong parenting role.
  - b. Identify successful approaches for ensuring that fathers obtain and maintain full employment, learn how to be active parents, and develop skills for coping with difficult relationships
5. Attempt to quantify the benefits that can be gained by increasing the level of active support that children receive from both parents;
6. Make recommendations for additional steps that the State of Iowa should take to remove the barriers that prevent children from receiving the emotional and financial support of both parents.

The work-group shall submit a written report to the governor outlining its finding, conclusions, and recommendations by December 31, 2000.

II. Organization. The director for the Iowa Department of Human Services will chair the Inter-Agency Work Group on Responsible Parenthood. The work group will consist of representatives from the following state agencies:

- A. Department of Public Health;
- B. Department of Workforce Development;
- C. Department of Education;
- D. Department of Corrections.

caused

Done

**IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF**, I have hereunto subscribed my name and

the Great Seal of Iowa to be affixed.

in Des Moines, Iowa this \_\_\_\_ day of March in the year of our Lord two thousand.

---

Thomas J. Vilsack  
Governor

ATTEST:

---

Chester J. Culver  
Secretary of State